

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST - AGM, 30 September 2007

Chairman's Annual Report

This can only be described as an outstanding year for the Trust. In April 2007 we completed the purchase of our new area of reserve, now known as 'Valley Marsh'. This increased the area of our reserve to nearly 10 acres and added tall-fen, wet woodland, a large pond and river bank to our portfolio of habitats. Valley marsh was officially opened on Saturday 1 September. A group of some 50 members, sponsors and friends gathered at its entrance to be greeted by the Chairman, who after welcoming everyone and thanking the many individuals and groups who had so generously contributed towards the appeal, paid tribute to Bernie Bobbin's pivotal role in the formation of the Bergh Apton Conservation Trust. Bernie spoke about the history of the project before cutting a green ribbon and declaring the reserve open. The party progressed to the pond area where glasses of pink fizz and slices of an imaginatively decorated cake, made by Jacquie Ratcliffe, were enjoyed by all in the beauty and tranquillity of a lovely sunny afternoon.

Much of our effort this year has centred on the new acquisition: starting an inventory of its biodiversity, seeking advice on future management and beginning some practical work. Annette Ford and Tony Davy have already recorded 79 species of plant. On 28 June, Rick Southwood (Site Manager for Natural England), who is responsible for managing their Broadland reserves, found time to visit the site. Among many helpful comments, he drew attention to the importance of our wet woodland (alder carr) because of its national scarcity, and advised cutting the tall fen for at least the next 6-7 years. He also agreed that the cricket-bat willows should be removed, as and when we can achieve this. We have already cut and raked-off two substantial experimental areas; we are grateful to Bernie Bobbin for assistance and Mrs Ba Stephens for the loan of equipment. We plan to purchase our own power scythe in order to extend the cut areas next year. A party of tax inspectors on a team-building day (6 September), led by Bob Kerry, cleared trees from around the pond and slubbed-out part of one of the dykes – a huge amount of labour for which we thank them. We have also built some experimental sluices on the main drainage dyke to retain more water on the site. Valley marsh presents many and varied challenges for management: we encourage enthusiastic members, old and new, to engage with this on our Saturday work-days or at other times by arrangement. The usual group of enthusiasts has been attending to our routine conservation tasks on Church Plantation, planting new hedges around the village and expanding the ongoing village hedge survey.

This year our friends Judy and John Geeson provided expertise for two of our most successful natural-history events. They led our very well-attended fungus foray (6 November 2006) illuminating the world of mushrooms and toadstools on our reserve for novices (most of us). Later they led our first 'Breakfast with the moths' (16 June). As they set up a moth trap overnight and opened it for inspection the next morning, people accustomed to staring into a harsh mercury-vapour lamp late at night were amazed to see the colours of the moths in daylight. Despite the poor weather and low temperatures an impressive diversity of moths was caught including magnificent Privet Hawk moths, Eyed Hawk moths and Poplar Hawk moths. The provision of bacon rolls, croissants and churros with chocolate sauce all made the event a very

sociable one, and John and Judy's identification skills and explanations meant that we all learned a lot as well.

The more traditional 'Breakfast with the birds' (6 May), a well-attended early bird walk led by David Lester, culminated at the Davys' house where a full English breakfast was served, notwithstanding the fact that they were entirely without a kitchen. The wildflower walk (10 June) focused on the Bergh Apton closed land-fill site, whose management has been taken over recently by the Parish Council. We recorded 135 plant species on this and another visit, including an attractive stand of bee orchids. The annual Pond Dipping (8 July), in our newly acquired pond, was very well attended - we were delighted to see so many new children with their parents and grandparents. A wide range of creatures was found both within the pond and on the nearby vegetation. Tadpoles of both frogs and newts are an encouraging indication of the pond's potential as a wildlife habitat. This year the water was particularly clear, perhaps an unexpected benefit of the unusually high rainfall. Sadly, torrential rain also caused the abandonment of the mid-summer barbeque and bonfire for the first time ever. The Christmas party at Flint Cottage (16 December 2006) was as convivial as ever. We were again excellently represented with a display at *Wild about Norfolk* (8-9 September) where we promoted our activities and made more useful contacts.

At the last AGM, Jacquie Ratcliffe, James Savill and Tony Davy were re-elected trustees. After the business, there was a discussion of the prospective land purchase and its future management. The trustees met three times during the year: 14 November 2006, and 15 February and 28 June 2007. At the first meeting, Tony Davy, Stephanie Crome and Bob Kerry were re-elected chairman, secretary and treasurer, respectively. Sandie Schröder kindly continued to act as Membership Secretary. During the year, James Savill resigned as a trustee and we record our warm gratitude to him for work and help over many years.

In summary, with the acquisition of Valley Marsh, we are now poised for an exciting expansion in our conservation work and its value, both to the local community and potentially in a larger arena, over the next several years. The support of members, in its diverse forms, will be increasingly important in maintaining this development.